

# Three exercises to jump-start engagement

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Similar to [Simon Sinek's Golden Circle](#) (shorter versions of his TEDTalk are available), The Purpose-Driven Employee Engagement Model has a *Why*, *How* and *What*, all of which are explained briefly below, and each of which has at least one exercise to help bolster your school's employee engagement.

## Why?

At the heart of your employee engagement strategy, and the center of the model, should be a clear purpose – or 'why'. Why does your institution exist? What greater good does it serve? What is its stated purpose – both internally and externally? Does it speak to employees' heads and hearts? Challenge yourself to go beyond "educating youth"; while this is certainly a noble endeavor, determine what makes your flavor of education unique. In other words, why might an employee choose to sign-on to your school and stay with it versus others?

While it might not to someone who has dedicated their career to the arts, or to students with learning differences, as someone with a deep working history in outdoor leadership, culture creation, education, sustainability/social responsibility, and a love for travel, United World Colleges' mission speaks to me: "making education a force to unite people, nations and cultures for peace and a sustainable future." Each school must have a clear purpose with which leaders and employees identify; it will lend to the school's and employees' resilience during hardship.

I know of one organization that briefly lost sight of its purpose at the beginning of the 2020 pandemic, but once the CEO reminded employees of the company's greater purpose – addressing poverty – employees quickly reengaged. We need something bigger than ourselves to believe in and work toward – especially during dark or challenging times. No matter your purpose, people need to know it, feel it, see it in action each day, and understand what their role is in realizing it. If your employee recruiting is on target, then

your institution's purpose will contribute to attracting and retaining employees with aligned purposes.

**Exercise #1:** Start having mini conversations with employees at all levels and in all roles within your school: Do all employees know the school's stated purpose and is it integral to the organization's ethos, strategy, operations, language, and used to guide employees' decision making? If your school doesn't have a clear purpose, assemble representatives from the following groups to create one and then vet it with all stakeholders: senior leadership, teachers, students, staff (e.g., custodian and executive assistant), alumni, board of directors, community members, key partners, et cetera.

## How?

It's important to create scaffolding for your employee engagement strategy – key components of which are listed around the outside of the model. Please note that these apply whether your employees are in school/on campus or telecommuting. Perhaps second in importance to purpose is *culture curation*. Every single school has a culture, somewhere on a spectrum from toxic to highly effective, and is born from what a community values (e.g., external appearances vs. authenticity), expects (e.g., sycophancy vs. compassion), and accepts (e.g., being late to meetings vs. being present). Your engagement initiatives ought to be aligned and resonate with the school's *values* and, ideally, to those of employees as well. To have staying power and avoid initiatives falling by the wayside during stressful times, imbed them in *existing systems*, so they become part of the fabric and expectations of the organization. Lastly, no matter what kind of *reflective process* you use, be sure to review what worked and didn't and adjust for the future; here, D<sup>2</sup>R<sup>2</sup> is offered: Design (the initiative), Do (implement it), Reflect (review what worked and didn't), and Refine (adjust future initiatives based on what was learned).

Exercise #2:

Rate the degree to which all stakeholders know and embrace your expressed values.

List all of your engagement strategies and rate their alignment with your purpose and expressed values (e.g., 1 = low; 4 = high). Be courageously candid and critical.

Determine if engagement strategies are integrated into existing systems – and the right ones - rather than stand-alone.

Evaluate the review process you employ to elicit learning and determine level of success (such as D<sup>2</sup>R<sup>2</sup>) upon conclusion of each initiative.

## What?

The nuts-and-bolts of engagement initiatives can be considered on a spectrum from light to robust, with *raising awareness* being on the light end, *action & ownership* being on the robust end, and *education* being in the middle. These initiatives may look different,

depending if your employees are in the classroom, on the road, connecting via a virtual platform, or telecommuting, or if you have a mix. A few examples from the case studies are provided below.



### Raise Awareness

### Educate

### Action & Ownership

*Raising Awareness:* signage around an office building/in classrooms (e.g., purpose statement and values, mental health statistics associated with home countries of your students, your school, community and/or school' country); newsletters (e.g., school and employee highlights); memos (e.g., synopsis of an upcoming optional training, social gathering, or volunteer opportunity); and state of the school meetings.

*Educating:* internal and external workshops; webinars; site visits or virtual tours; expert guests; and other professional development programs, differing in length and intensity. You might poll your employees to learn about their desires and needs; employees who feel seen, heard, and valued tend to be more engaged. Authentically seek their input when appropriate.

*Action & Ownership:* being provided paid time off to serve a community organization, delve into professional development, or attend a march; conducting a personal resiliency audit and being given a stipend to engage in pursuits to strengthen resilience; applying for a grant or reassign time to make an innovative change in one's division to advance strategy

Exercise #3: Determine if your school offers a range of strategies to engage diverse employees, so as to meet them where they are in interest, bandwidth, responsibilities, and needs.

For more and to contact Dr. Moran, please see her company's website:

[Zen for Business](#)